The State of 'Academic Apartheid' in Arab Universities: A Radical Pedagogical Analysis

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This study assesses the reasons that contributed to the rise of 'Academic Apartheid' in Arab higher educational institutions, by dwelling on their failure in overcoming alienation from indigenous epistemology, emancipating education from its colonial past, and trudging into the modern information age. Furthermore, the study alludes to the tenuous position of the Arab academic/research in rediscovering the epistemological framework of their indigenous world. The study concludes that the present institutional 'clanocratic' approaches to academic administration have ruinous effects on the performance of Arab academia including the arrest of transition toward modernization.

Key Words: Arab Scholar, Emancipatory Discourse, Alienation, Neo-colonialism

INTRODUCTION

Epistemological segregation, which denies academics the opportunity to transform and renovate their indigenous world, signifies the rising alarm of 'academic apartheid' ethos in Arab higher educational institutions. Shifting the term 'apartheid' from its semantic racial connotation to an epistemological one illustrates three schematic aspects of segregation in Arab higher education system: (1) alienation from indigenous epistemology, (2) failure to emancipate education from its colonial past, (3) inability to trudge into the modern information age. The conditions, of what we term as 'academic apartheid', have been attributed to three structural or situational factors that hamper the role of higher education in social and political change. These are: (i) the failure of social and political institutions to meet the aspirations of society for higher education (Khashan, 2000); (ii) the slowness of universities in adapting their programs to the changing political, economic, social and cultural conditions (Nasser & Abouchedid, 2000); (iii) over dependence on Western models of education.

In the present study, alienation is mapped out along two levels of classification: (i) alienation as a subjective experience of feelings of dissatisfaction and rejection of the established order; (ii) behavioral consequences of alienation—that is withdrawal, acquiesce, or revolt (Barakat, 1977). A question of relevance to epistemological alienation is the extent to which traditional loyalties and neo-patriarchal societal practices

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become institutionalized mechanisms to maintain the status quo of higher educational institutions in Lebanon. As observed by Bashshur (1988), a university mirrors the society and the centers of power in it. In view of the ties between universities and society, the present study explains some of the conditions prevalent in universities in Lebanon, which contribute to epistemological alienation. It would seem not possible to explain these conditions without reference to some historical factors and current social conditions of Lebanon's higher education system. These factors and conditions help further analyze institutional failure to emancipate education from its colonial past such as the role of missionaries in establishing educational institutions. In addition, the failure of educational institutions to trudge into the modern information age stems from their inability to emancipate education from its colonial past; hence least likely to present its own version into the patchwork quilt of globalization.

The present study seeks to examine these dimensions from a critical pedagogical perspective, which "…illuminates the relationship among knowledge, authority, and power" (Giroux, 1994: 30). In doing so, our analyses will be shifted from methodological individualism in social theory— which considers power being exercised by the individual decision-makers (Bauman, 1987)—to methodological structuralism that views power as the by-product of a complex collectivist social behavior engendered by colonial forces influencing education. We negate in this process the post-structuralist idealist methodology in which self-generating discourse overrides engagement with, or understanding of the complexities of interactions of historical and social systems with their institutions. The importance of methodological structuralism in analyzing the status of higher education in the context of epistemological alienation lies in its emphases on the mutually inclusive and interactive processes between historical and sociopolitical limitations that hamstring the Arab academic/researcher from becoming a transformer of his/her indigenous world.

Epistemological Alienation

Alienation in general can be defined as a process which renders the individual into objective states: they become products and objects, rather than creative actors engaged in meaningful activity (Barakat, 1993). In the Arab-academic seen scholars/researchers apprehend reality as external to their local context. The reason was explained by Massaiala & Jarrar, (1991) who observed that although Arab universities were greatly influenced by the their European counterpart, they had difficulty in developing their own indigenous educational philosophy and academic practices since they were not granted a charter that would safeguard their independence from the government. The government in turn, puts higher education within the framework of the respective civil service. Arab researchers function, therefore, as mere translators of Western epistemology, which is imported from the West, repackaged and delivered to the Arab information consumer. Hence, knowledge becomes outlandish to the cultural, social, and political realities of the native Arab learner (Nasser & Abouchedid, 2000).

Epistemological quandary that prevails in the Arab higher educational institutions has its direct toll on the performance of the Arab academic/researcher. Today, Arab

academics/researchers are at a loss. They loathe their educational systems and distrust their authoritarian academic administrations but capitulate to their "academic chieftains" threatened by the constant job insecurity lest they loose their daily bread. They propagate reform through their academic writing but disagree about the course of action. More harming is that educational stagnation that makes it difficult for the Arab academic/researcher to accommodate the challenges of modernity by transforming knowledge into an indigenous epistemological framework. Current perceptions of the role of education have further contributed to its disembodiment from the course of epistemological transformation, i.e., making knowledge compatible with the social, political and cultural realities of the Arab learner. In particular, education is viewed as a process of certification after students have fulfilled the functional requisites of rote memorization of the content of one course after another.

At the teaching level, as many universities in the West are keen at providing practical and authentic student-centered instruction, by contrast, teaching in Arab universities is mostly teacher-centered and theoretical often relying on the "Euro-American course textbook" which is virtually detached from cultural contexts of the indigenous (Abouchedid, 1994). From the personal experience of the researchers of the present study, discussions or researches involving students in Arab universities rarely debate the applicability of Western epistemology to Arab ontology, and even students question the credentials of their teacher if she/he sought to learn from the student's experience. To exemplify this idea, during a sociology class, one of the authors of the present study expressed the desire to learn from the personal experiences of his undergraduate students. In response, a student said "We are not in a position to teach you Sir…we are paying tuition fees to learn not to teach". Such an attitude accentuates the day-care center mentality of higher educational bureaucrats who encourage babysitting approaches to teaching and learning often dissuading instructors from discussing topics not required by the textbook assigned to the course. A university that avails laboratories, seminar rooms, and other learning facilities with an original and critical faculty, who can debate and discuss issues relevant to one's culture, will not prevail to produce Arab students with the ability to generate and expound the boundaries of knowledge laid out for them. Alas, the researcher/scholar in the Arab world is bounded by relative isolation being the typical obedient public servant— knowledge is rendered to the condition of pseudo-intellectualism which does not go beyond the status of object (passive actor) to the status of actor/subject (critical actor) (Illich, 1973).

The deeply ingrained concept of the teacher authority in students' minds and the test bound courses coalesce to par the student from becoming a critical thinker and contributor to social change. For example, ordinary Arab students who have been trained for obedience and respect of authority are more likely to detach themselves from classroom discussions for fear of challenging the undisputed authority of the 'infallible' teacher whose grade book controls the academic future of the student. In reaction, teachers complain about their students' lethargy and lack of motivation in the classroom; hence students and teachers are besieged in a lingering pedagogical process characterized by mutual fear and distrust.

From another perspective, many Arab academics/researchers who have had their higher education in Euro-American universities are discouraged by how higher education systems function. Critical of the knowledge they have acquired in the West, Arab researches are inimical of academic bureaucrats who are parishioners and resuscitators of Western ideas and staunch to Western techniques and styles of pedagogy not fitting with the requirements of indigenous learning in the Arab world. Those bureaucrats feel inferior to the tremendous prowess of Western technology as they helplessly rely on Western expertise in the implementation of educational and technological programs in their respective universities. In addition, academic bureaucrats who are repugnant to innovation and technological change proposed by Arab researchers adamantly reject the Arab indigenous know-how. Comparatively, while Arab universities fail to promote Arab indigenous knowledge, other universities in developing countries (e.g., India) have taken a bipolar course of action. For instance, in the case of India, researchers/academicians have taken their work seriously in their respective fields of specialty as to nationalize local problems while rejecting foreign interference or research on local and indigenous issues by a foreign entity (Barnes, 1982). Similarly, in Latin America, a grass-root movement has replaced development programs in rural areas—established by the United Nations programs in conjunction with local institutions and universities—with more indigenous local programs that meet the immediate grass-root needs of society (Shaw and Grieve, 1979).

At the research level, the problems in validating Western knowledge and generating an indigenous one are pervasive in Arab universities. Most universities in Arab countries are not research oriented. Private universities as is the case of the American University of Beirut remain an adamantly teaching institution. In fact, however, Arab universities do little research compared to universities in Latin America (e.g., Brazil) whose 80% of their budget for research is allocated to their universities, while the rest goes to non-governmental organizations and municipal agencies (Akkari and Perez, 1998). The case in point is that shortage researcher initiative and lack of research grants allocated to research have resulted in a situation in which teaching loads on instructors increase to the detriment of research activity and scholarly initiative. For example, since many Arab universities value teaching more than research, academic bureaucrats such as Chairpersons and Deans request Faculty to teach up to five courses per semester. One must wonder why academic bureaucrats dissuade researchers from undertaking scholarly activities such as research? From our personal experience, we think that academic bureaucrats perpetuate their social prestigious and political authority by impeding any potential boat-rocking research that might dig up social and political issues, which undermines their own autocratic rule in academia and prefer to maintain them buried.

Anti-research attitudes and behaviors in Arab universities are clearly reflected in the number of publications produced in Arab countries. The statistics on publishing in the Arab World are staggering. For instance, academic journals published by Arab universities do not reach 50, while the US alone, has over 20,000 scientific journals (Nasser and Abouchedid, 2001) as they increase in a snow ball fashion on a daily basis. In addition, despite the fact that book publishing does not take a substantial or massive financial undertaking, the limited scholarly effort in Arab states suggests that little is

interpreted through looking at the Arab indigenous learning needs from the cannon within. By and large, epistemological alienation in the Arab world has resulted from the absence of restorative educational movements that block two main sources of alienation, i.e., colonialism and social behavior.

The Legacy of the Colonial Past and its Shadows on the Present

Indigenous Arab private and public educational institutions have been established during the colonial period more than one century ago. Colonialism, which is a dominance of one culture over another, has been propagated through colonial schools in many parts of the Arab world. Missionary educational invasion of the Arab Levantine, which took place in the 19th century under the guise of science and humanity, led to an impressive spread of Jesuit and Protestant missionary educational institutions (Szyliowicz, 1973). The role of colonial education has given the indigenous Arab not only a difficult course of development but patched for Arabs to develop their schools and universities with modern principles. In Lebanon, for instance, two types of schools and universities were established during the 19th century. The first, patterned after the French and British educational systems as a signal of solidarity and shared interests between the colonial bourgeoisie and the Arab native intellectual and economic elite. Thus, Jesuit and Protestant emissaries, local Arab churches, and private holders have dominated the private higher education sector in an attempt to help Arab students appreciate the "Christian Life" (Penrose, 1970). In reality, however, foreign universities have removed their "Christian gowns" and secularized their governance of higher education to maintain a Western cultural influence over parts of the Middle East mainly through foreign language teaching. As a result, many French and American universities in Lebanon remind students of the superiority of European languages such as English and French on the assumption that these languages are able to provide definitions of concepts and derive new theories of knowledge.

The second type of schools was established by proponents of Arab nationalism (Khashan, 2000) who aspired for a counter-colonial model of education capable of healing the masses from their woes resulting from colonial subjugation. As a result, two diametrically opposing types of educational institutions have emerged: one maintaining self-imposed isolation from Western epistemology and insulation from foreign ideas while the second endorsing Western education.

At present, many universities and schools in Arab Gulf states adopt Western models of epistemology and education placing a greater value on American or British higher education degrees with a penchant to recruit faculty who have been couched along Western epistemological lines. Ironically, many of these universities teach in Arabic as a form of pseudo-indigenizing process of education. This type of educational institutions mostly established in Syria and Iraq pursues a reactionary counter-negative discourse to Western epistemology being accused of breeding Western imperialist ideas, which seek to usurp the cultural values of Arabs and destroy their national identities. These two types of education systems have not yet been successful in securing an alternative tenable indigenous discourse of education that seeks to find an amicable marriage between

national education and Western epistemology. In addition, the various Arab systems of education have not yet been able to trudge into the development of an Arab indigenous pedagogy that resonates with the cultural, social, and political realities of the Arab indigenous. Instead, attempts to indigenize education have given radical groups substantial claims to revolt against Western colonial models of education by seeking to establish their educational institutions, often championing resistance of the intents and effects of colonial epistemology. For instance, the more recent setting up of Islamic universities in Jordan, Lebanon, and the West Bank was a semblance of an Islamic revitalization movement attempting at radicalizing and indigenizing education in the framework of Islamization. Hence, Islamic educational programs run against the Western epistemological grain, placing Islamic values in a collision course with the Western civilization. It is in this context that the individual who feels that through his exposure to epistemologies which make little sense to his/her own past (Clignet, 1971), regresses to fundamentalist ideas in a bid to reinvigorate his/her usurped past. Hence, colonialism has created safe heavens for the breeding of anti-Western epistemologies in many parts of the Arab world, often blaming the West for meddling in Arab thinking by transplanting contradictory epistemologies and thoughts in it (Boullata, 1990).

Western countries have certainly interfered, among other things, with the cultural, political and economic evolution of the Arabs, but wholesale criticism of the West misses the point. Issawi (1981), for instance, sees that intellectual and cultural stagnation accompanied by economic decline, are the result of Arab evolutionary processes, which are mostly unrelated to Western colonialism. Lebanese sociologist Halim Barakat (1993) laments much of Arab grievances on collectivist behavior which is the source of the dominant value orientations in Arab society. Furthermore, Khashan (1992) considers that a highly distinctive feature of Arab collectivist behavior is the continuing dominance of primary group relations characterized by patron-client interests. Collectivism, patron-client relationships, and the many centuries of cultural stagnation and deterioration in the Arab world had their toll on Arab higher educational systems. In addition, the lack of an indigenous course of action together with Arab fondness of the West's distinct experience in modernization coalesced to bar Arab academics/researchers from taking an active role in the making of the modern information age.

Failure to Trudge into the Information Age

The issue of modernity has preoccupied Arab intellectuals, reforms, and politicians since the beginning of the 19th century. With the advent of the information age, most Arab institutions of higher education highlight the need to meet the functional requisites of the modern information age. Although Arab universities are recently organized in order to trudge into the age of information and technology, they have not yet possessed the necessary skills related to information and, in particular, skills related to electronic education, media, and publishing (Nasser & Abouchedid, 2001). Thus, information has been presented in terms of extensions of the Western information system with a greater reliance on the knowing that (how to operate machines) than on knowing how (skills that provide information). In addition, despite the enthusiastic acceptance and worship of the information age, very little has been done in Arab universities to transform the

indigenous printed word to an indigenous electronic language as a platform for wider scholarly communication among Arab and Western scholars. Hence, information technology in most Arab universities is presented as a fundamental key to institutional financial growth through soliciting students to tinker with the 'university electronics' rather than as a tool for social and cultural change in times when other countries are marching en route the global information society. Even more, information-technological progress in higher educational institutions are unwarranted by the strength of traditional values and internal institutional politics.

A country's intellectual life is a measure of the overall social, cultural, and political health of society. Advanced Western societies have vibrant intellectual atmospheres, whereas those of underdeveloped societies are victims of stagnation (Khahsan, 2000). Political oppression, over-dependence on the Western world, institutional apparatchik methods, and censorship make the intellectual life of Arab societies unavoidably stagnant. Arab higher educational institutions seem to suffer, almost invariably, from the same attributes of epistemological torpidity. Institutional denial of the basic rights of the Arab academic/researcher, including self-expression and academic freedom by the academic ruling elite who gain their prowess and legitimacy from the patriarchal and nepotistic political system, prevent Arab scholars from pursuing innovation and creative thinking. Nepotistic academic institutions, to use the words of Hafiz (1996, 7-8), made it easy for "…the beasts of darkness, the enemies of the intellect and freedom" to destroy independent thinking and creativity.

Institutional promises made to Arab academics/researchers about encouraging self-expression and creativity are revoked by the formation of competing academic cliques and camps pitted against each other. The academic in the Arab world is spotted with political camps, not clearly defined and permissible in their boundaries. These centers have been a source destabilization to the indigenous researchers/scholars; they consume the researcher in intricacies, inconsistencies, whimsical decisions, and a constant regime change. In addition, agencies of official repression are dominant nowadays in many Arab higher educational institutions. These institutions which have internal networks of spies and informants who serve the ruling academic elite and deliberate marginalization of sincere and hard-working scholars, push the Arab intellectual class to abandon its role as social transformers, critical thinkers, and agents of social change. Arab scholars/researcher, unable to marshal adequate support for their initiatives for liberating academia from institutional coercion and nepotism, have difficulty planning the future of their countries. Despite that, there are independent, critical and research oriented Arab scholars/researchers who relentlessly challenge the politics of the system with their own techno-scholarly initiatives. Their chief concerns become external accountability, freeing academia from its chains of "political dogmatism," and building the network of researchers who wish to make a change. However, those academics/researchers are often turned away or recruited into the small paternalistic and patriarchal circles of academia that neutralize their radical stamina and desire for changeast. Even a supportive administration and academic body can be fettered by a strong and enterprising board of directors who have philanthropically provided substantial amounts of money to a university. As instances of uncontrollable requirements and performance expectation lead

to a low sense of commitment to the organization-in effect-performance (viz. Instruction and research). More harming is that the debilitating effects of higher educational 'clanocracy', patriarchal practices, and nepotism on the Arab intellectual life create an epistemological vacuum that compels the academic/scholar to abstain taking a stance on burning societal or political issues.

CONCLUSION

In concert with critical theory in education which is concerned with the workings of power in and through pedagogical discourses, the present study has tied analyses of Arab higher educational institutions with those of social and epistemological conditions including colonialism and social injustices. The paper explored the aversion to epistemological renovation and resistance to the incorporation of new indigenous principles into higher educational institutions led to an intellectual stagnation and perpetuated the loss of will to change. Institutional clanocratic and nepotistic behavior which stifles the ability of academics/researchers to alter the status quo of indigenous epistemological state of oblivion is to be blamed on academic ruling elite. Academic ruling elite behavior, institutional nepotism and clientelism should be eradicated by relinquishing the roots of repression and violation of academic freedom and creativity. Higher educational institutions must find a way to emancipate from the burdens of Western epistemological encapsulation and analytical frigidity. Academics, who find themselves surrounded by institutional gloom as they trudge into the new century, need to get prepared to deal with its challenges.

Our intention was not to place the greater responsibility of academic failure on the indigenous Arab researcher/academic. Although, the cultural capital of the colonial has offset substantially indigenous forms of education, the uncritical approach to survey and deliver from the Western epistemology to the indigenous one have had an impact on what is learned or not learned on the Arab world. What is now happening is that schooling is creating a generation of internalizers but not producers, which worn of a negative effect of this kind of schooling on students' identity formation. The process of emancipation from the colonial past and the overwhelming influence of Western epistemology start with a restoration cultural movement of a due and discernible nature that is capable of invigorating the indigenous Arab epistemology.

Colonialism has substantial influence on social relations within a nation and between nations. With its design to concentrate the power in the hands of the few educational institutions have been designed for that particular segment of society leaving behind the greater majority of the masses. Scholars within universities need to address the purpose of education and its role to deliver to the wider community. Although the market-oriented mentality of universities in the Arab world promote every effort for the majority of Arab students to receive a Western form of education, the private university scholar remains passive not only to the reality of the demographics Arab states but also to the epistemological issues in education. Furthermore, with the rapid technological development coupled with economic and social globalization the times have been revolutionary in terms of knowledge transfer. However, the Arab scholar has been

prevented from making use of the structure of dissemination of knowledge. Hence, the scholar has done little to transform the pedagogical relation that defines power between student/teacher or even student/material. Unless the idea of reforming the Arab university into more accountable procedures, professional development, democratic processes, and the restructuring of the Arab university classroom (i.e., changing power relations), the university as the paragon of social change will remain in alms of the forces of decadence and stagnation.

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